

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: SOPN, CZ
SUBJECT: "LIBERATION 1945," CZECHOSLOVAK MAJOR FILM PRODUCTION

1. "LIBERATION 1945" IS LOCALLY BILLED AS THE CROWING ACHIEVEMENT IN CZECHOSLOVAK FILM MAKING IN RECENT YEARS. THE FOUR-HOUR FILM, COSTING 24 MILLION CROWNS AND TAKING THREE YEARS TO MAKE, IS SEEN BY THE CZECHOSLOVAK FILM INDUSTRY AS ITS ANSWER TO "PATTON," "THE LONGEST DAY," AND OTHER WORLD WAR II EXTRAVANGANZAS. IT PREMIERED IN PRAGUE THEATERS DURING THE MONTH OF MAY TO HELP COMMEMORATE THE SOVIET ROLE IN THE LIBERATION OF CZECHOSLOVAKIA.

2. RECENTLY THE PAO JOINED A NUMBER OF RETIRED PEOPLE, SCHOOL DELEGATIONS AND VISITING JAPANESE TOURISTS IN A ONE-THIRD FILLED DOWNTOWN THEATER TO SEE THE MUCH-HERALDED FILM. IT WAS A DISTINCT DISAPPOINTMENT, DESPITE EXCELLENT CAMERA WORK, SOME GOOD CHARACTER ACTING, AND SKILLED EDITING. SO MUCH OF THE FILM IS DEVOTED TO RAW PROPAGANDA THAT THE ENTIRE EFFORT IS QUICKLY SPOILED. THE FINAL SCENES FEATURE THE VICTORIOUS SOVIET ARMY CRANKING INTO PRAGUE BY TANK AFTER BUILDING A TEMPORARY BRIDGE FOR VEHICLES IN 40 MINUTES. IN PRAGUE MEN, WOMEN, AND CHILDREN THROW LILACS AT THE TANKS, OFFER THE WAR-WEARY HEROES PITCHERS OF FRESH MILK AND PLATES OF HOME-BAKED CAKES, KISS THE RED FLAG, ETC. ARRIVING
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BY AIRPLANE FROM THE SOVIET UNION IS THE PROVISIONAL GOVERNMENT. KLEMENT GOTTWALD IS AS PROMINENTLY FEATURED AS PRESIDENT BENES, AND THE FINAL SEQUENCE IS GOTTWALD'S FACE, AND THEN HIS WORDS ABOUT THE PERMANENCY OF CZECHOSLOVAK-SOVIET LOVE AND FRIENDSHIP AS THE CAMERA FADES TO A PANORAMA SHOT OF PRAGUE IN SPRINGTIME.

3. THE AMERICAN ANGLE IN THE FILM IS A MINUTE-LONG SEQUENCE

WHERE A SUPERBLY CONFIDENT SOVIET GENERAL RECEIVES A SCARECROW-SHAPED, HESITANT FOUR-STAR AMERICAN GENERAL IN AN OFFICE WITH A GIANT MAP OF CZECHOSLOVAKIA FILLED WITH RED ARROWS. THE LATTER INFORMS THE SOVIETS AMERICAN TROOPS HAVE REACHED THEIR AGREED UPON LINES FROM KARLOVY VARY TO PILSEN AND CESKE BUDEJOVICE AND WOULD BE WILLING TO LEND AIR AND ARTILLERY SUPPORT TOWARD THE LIBERATION OF PRAGUE. THE SOVIET GENERAL THANKS HIM AND SAYS THAT WON'T BE NECESSARY. THERE IS A LOT OF WORK FOR BOTH SIDES TO DO AND THE SOVIETS ARE ALREADY IN PROCESS OF CHASING THE "FASCISTS" FROM THE PRAGUE REGION, THE RED ARMY WILL LIBERATE PRAGUE. THANKS ANYHOW. SHOT OF A CONFIDENT RUSSIAN FACE AND CLINCHED FIST.

4. MOVIE'S SO-CALLED DRAMATIC SCENES ARE LARGELY OF LEATHER-JACKETED PARTISANS SCOOTING UP AND DOWN PRAGUE STREETS TRADING RIFLES WITH ONE ANOTHER, BUILDING BARRICADES, OR EXCHANGING SHOTS WITH WEARY GERMAN TROOPS. THERE ARE LONG SEQUENCES OF RUSSIAN GENERALS TALKING TO EACH OTHER, GERMAN GENERALS DOING LIKEWISE, AND MEMBERS OF THE CLANDESTINE COMMUNIST PARTY SYSTEMATICALLY PLANNING THE TOWN'S LIBERATION AND THE OPERATION OF THE GOVERNMENT.

5. NON-COMMUNIST POLITICIANS ARE PICTURED AS HEAVY-SET, JOWLY, BOURGEOIS ELEMENT WITH FUR-CLAD WIVES. THEY EAT SALAMI AND DRINK WINE AT POLITICAL MEETINGS WHILE LEANER, MORE IDEALISTIC COMMUNIST COUNTERPARTS ARE DOING THE ACTUAL WORK OF LIBERATING THE TOWN AND REESTABLISHING ORDER. NON-COMMUNIST POLY WAS TO BRING THE BRITISH AND AMERICAN FORCES INTO PRAGUE, AND THAT OBVIOUSLY FAILED. DIRECTOR, MAKEUP AND COSTUMING STAFFS DO A REASONABLY SKILLED JOB OF CREATING CARICATURE OF NON-COMMUNIST POLITICAL ELEMENTS, MAKING THEM LOOK LIKE HESITANT BUFFOONS.

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6. COMMENT: DESPITE OVERWHELMING PUBLICITY, THIS FILM HAS NOT TAKEN HOLD IN PRAGUE FOR OBVIOUS REASONS. IT IS ANOTHER EXAMPLE OF THE COMMUNIST EFFORT TO REWRITE HISTORY AND THEN TO PUBLICIZE THE NEW VERSION OF HOW CZECHOSLOVAKIA WAS LIBERATED. BY DETERMINEDLY KEEPING THE MEMORY OF WORLD WAR II ALIVE, IT REINFORCES THE COUNTRY'S RUSSIAN TIE, GIVES IT A POSITIVE HISTORICAL DIMENSION, AND HELPS DETRACT FROM BOTH THE POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC PROBLEMS OF THE MOMENT, AND OF THE MORE SORDID SIDE OF CZECHOSLOVAK-RUSSIAN RELATIONS; I.E., WHEN THE SOVIET TANKS ENTERED PRAGUE A SECOND TIME IN 1968, AND WHEN THEY WERE WELCOMED, NOT AS LIBERATORS, BUT AS INVADERS.

7. THE AMBASSADOR'S RECENT TRIP TO AMERICAN WAR MEMORIALS IN WESTERN AND SOUTHERN CZECHOSLOVAKIA WAS AN EFFORT TO PRESENT A DIFFERENT VERSION OF THE END OF WORLD WAR II, AS WERE VOA REPORTS OF THE EVENT. THE PAO ALSO PREPARED A PHOTO MURAL OF THE MAY 7-8 VISIT, WHICH CONTINUES TO ATTRACT SIZABLE CROWDS OF CZECHOSLOVAKS IN THE EMBASSY'S DISPLAY

WINDOWS. IRONICALLY, IT, TOO, IS TITLED "LIBERATION 1945."

BYRNE

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